A NEW DICK TRACY BIO

Penguin has just released Jay Meader's DICK TRACY: THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY. Very nice trade paperback with reprints of some of the early dailies and Sundays. Far superior to the reprint of CELEBRATED CASES which reduced all the strips to postage stamp size. Meader gives biographies of all of Gould's better known villains and the book is indexed for quick reference. It could use a bibliography, but you can't have everything. $16.95 at your local comic book dealer.

DICK TRACY REDUX

I'm a big Gould fan. I used to buy the Harvey reprints, even though they were censored under the CCA. Do you remember how they used to white out guns and corpses? Some crook would be yelling "Hands up!" only they'd white out the gun so he'd just be pointing at his victims, or cops would be looking at a dead body only all you'd see would be a green blob of color. What was really funny was that the mayhem was allowed in daily newspapers, but not in the comic book reprints. Only one of the many hypocricies of the Code.

As surreal as the Dick Tracy strip was I almost think that Gould thought he was doing it straight. Every interview I ever read with him he touted his scientific approach to crime-fighting, and his use of real techniques, but that was where the reality of the strip ended. You mention Breathless stabbing a woman in the back with garden shears when she could have knocked her out and that's an example of the kind of villains Gould used to set you up for [that old *love to hate* routine]. My favorite crazy plot was the one where a crime boss is paying blackmail money to an old woman who has a Judge Crater type in a tree. The crime boss had murdered the judge twenty years before and hidden his body in a tree in the Amazon jungle. The old woman had the tree, still with skeleton in it transplanted to her green house in the U.S. My feeling is, why didn't the crime boss just throw the judge in the Amazon river when he killed him, or barring that, why not just bump off the old lady and dispose of the corpse? Of course if he'd done that there wouldn't have been a plot, as screwy and illogical though it was.

PAR HOLMAN [5/18/90]

It is strange that the artist should have no standards and be constantly trying to live up to other people's standards.

-Walter Inglis Anderson

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DICK TRACY R.I.P.

Warren Beatty hasn't convinced me that *period* Dick Tracy is such a good idea. His performance on the Donahue Show [6/21/90] was a lot more fun than his stuffy portrayal of old Plainclothes Tracy. I like seeing all that old stuff, the cars, the tommy guns, but I think a high-tech modernized DT would have done better on the market. Compared to ROBOCOP and TOTAL RECALL, the stunt action sucks. Don't we get enough nostalgia from those yearly tours of Spielberg's toy collection?

Hyper-hype notwithstanding, any character in a rain slicker carrying an outdated machine gun is going to have a hard time competing with characters like The Terminator and Robocop. The problem with all the advanced PR is it makes you [me, for sure.] sick of the characters before the movie even opens. That little *behind the scenes* tv clip did nothing for me. On the one hand they are praising the color scheme, saying they used only the same six colors that were used to print the old DT Sundays, patting themselves on the back for their authenticity, but this is only surface autheticity, because the film violates most of Gould's characters. I've got news for Beatty. Breathless Mahoney was a cold-blooded murderer, a money-grubbing, back-stabbling scumbag in Gould's forties strip. She was no torch singer and Tracy never caught her. She was strangled by B. O. Plenty. Why bother to be authentic with the goddamned colors when you are going to lie about the history of the characters? And, sure, it's a lie. *Even if their history is fictional, it is what Gould's readers think of as the truth about them.*

And there are only *three* primary colors, not *six*, tv folks. Where did you guys go to school?

I enjoyed the DICK TRACY movie and I realize that the aspects of it which bother me will mean nothing to a generation untroubled by the actual history of characters like Little Face, Mumbles, and Breathless Mahoney. My point is the Chester Gould strips provide enough action that it is not necessary to reshape and lie about the destinies of the various heavies, particularly when your selling point purports to be authenticity! If Beatty wanted to design a new character as a femme fatale and foil for Tracy, fine, but why not give her a name of her own? The character played by Madonna isn't the Breathless Mahoney Gould created, so why upset the older fans by saying she is? To lump all Gould's villains together in one giant conspiracy against Tracy is to deny them their uniqueness. As for Beatty's portrayal of Tracy, most of the film he looked like an aging actor making a hemorrhoids commericial. I don't know what he thinks those facial close-ups are supposed to mean, but I thought he was in need of a good shot of metamucil. I know Tracy was an uptight character and Beatty was trying to keep that aspect of him onscreen, but he was so inanimate most of the time he might as well have been wrapped in latex along with Prune Face and the others. No background was given on his relationship with Tess or how she got involved with him, why she would be interested in an aging cop who ran around in a yellow raincoat even when it wasn't raining. No explanation as to why Dick had both Pat Patton and Sam Ketchum working with him when most cops only have one partner at a time and Gould was always careful to research his police procedure. You'd think Beatty would have known that Ketchum became Dick's partner after the death of Patton, but the people involved in making these mega-comic strip films have a way of ignoring the field and doing whatever they feel like doing no matter what it does to the film or the characters therein.

I feel the same way about those Dick Tracy comic books from Disney. That character is all right, but he's not Dick Tracy anymore than Beatty is.

N. B.: This cops and robhers stuff is all bullshit anyway. Some Chicago cops were on the pad as were many of the politicians during the era of Prohibition [1920-33] which handed this country over to organized crime. It was Eliot Ness and his crew that fought actively against Al Capone and his followers. For the actual history of this period, I recommend Klingaman's 1929: THE YEAR OF THE GREAT CRASH, 1989. -Clay Geerdes

MICHAELANGELO, MEET McSNURTLE!

Though Eastman and Laird's Ronin parody has now filled the preadolescent psyche with Mutant Ninja Turtles, this was not the first time a turtle was used for such a purpose. In FUNNY STUFF. [New York: National Periodicals], DC cartoonists parodied their own funny animals and McSNURTLE THE TURTLE became THE TERRIFIC WHATZIT, a parody of THE FLASH, THE FASTEST MAN ALIVE. THE FLASH has his own television series starting this September. Maybe DC will catch up with TMNT.

TENDER CINEMATIC MOMENT OF THE WEEK: Four turtles united with their rat atop a building in New York. When I was certain I wouldn't be surrounded by a thousand geeky little kids in turtle t-shirts giggling *Cowabunga* at each other, I slipped into a mall matinee and watched the NINJA TURTLE movie. I enjoyed the cameraderie of the turtles a great deal, but found the rest of the plot racist, sexist, and unenlightened, a throwback to the days of *inscrutable orientals* a la Wu Fang, Ming the Merciless, and Fu Manchu. For me, it was FISTS OF FURY in muppet drag. Thankfully, the filmmakers spared us the absurdity of having the token woman crawl into bed with Raphael. Don't laugh. Bestiality came into vogue with Howard the Duck and Beverly and continues routinely in Disney's new ROGER RABBIT comic book. If you don't see this as insulting to women, you probably think HARLEM NIGHTS was a compliment to the Black community. -C.G.

NEGATOONS

The third Roger Rabbit cartoon was shown with the Beatty movie and it was a repeat of the first two, brilliant animation of totally unsympathetic and unfunny characters, Baby Herman and Roger Rabbit. The cartoon didn't get one single laugh from the audience I sat with, not one. And it is easy to see why not. Baby Herman is a disgusting little asshole and no one cares if he gets used as a dart board or bounced out of a roller coaster. Roger's voice is enough to make anyone hate him the first time he opens his mouth. These cartoons are cruel and violent and lack any human feeling and the people making them may think they are upstaging Tex Avery, but they need to go back and look at those early cartoons a little more carefully. There has to be a reason why we love Bugs Bunny and Droopy and I think the misguided animators will find it's the same reason we hate Roger and that disgusting little cigar-smoking refugee from the old OUR GANG shorts. These Maroon cartoons, like many of the thrillers of today, try to overpower the viewer with violence and sound effects, but this only works with clods. Anyone who thinks realizes that any cartoon that lacks a balance of sympathy isn't going to satisfy. The viewer left an Avery cartoon feeling satisfied. There was always a catharsis, a relief of tension. You walk out of a Roger Rabbit cartoon feeling like someone just gave you a beating. He's a frenetic little anxiety-neurotic and simply not a credible leading character.

Roger needs revision badly. Even in the new Disney comic book, he is failing. He must either be active or passive and if he is passive he has no raison d'etre. Thus far, he's basically superfluous. The sexism and the bestiality have to go. Women do not marry rabbits even in comic books and when women figure in comic book stories they have to function as people, not props. Jessica Rabbit shows up in ROLLER COASTER RABBIT for a few seconds tied to the tracks as the roller coaster speeds over her. A single sight gag. As far as we know she is *still* tied to the tracks, because she was never released in the film. I would suggest the animators sit down and look at this stuff and think about it for awhile. Technology is not all. Cartoons may be computer generated these days, but the audience is still human.

-Clay Geerdes

HEY, NEETERS 5 is $1.45 pp from Saga Graphics, POB 1378, Belmont, CA 94002. A good story. Made me chuckle.

EL VIBORA 125 is $8 pp from J. M. Berengueur, Plaza Beatas 3, Barcelona, Spain. EL VIBORA reruns stories by Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton in Spanish.

LEX PORNOGRAPHICUS

"It cannot be reasonably argued that the violence, perversion, abuse of women, graphic depictions of all forms of sexual conduct, and microscopic descriptions of human genitalia contained on this recording are comedic art," stated U. S. District Court Judge Jose Gonzalez declaring 2 LIVE CREW's *As Nasty as They Wanna Be* obscene. "It is an appeal to *dirty* thoughts and the loins, not to the intellect and the mind."

[Between these two quotations, 2 Live Crew was busted in Broward County, Florida. This, in a state that has an economy based upon laundered drug money--see Brian Freemantle's THE FIX for details.]

"Whether the lyrics are silly, offensive, vulgar or even violent, is beside the point. They are words, and according to our most treasured constitutional document, the First Amendment, we have the right to say them and hear them. . . If we don't fight for the juvenile and vulgar lyrics of 2 Live Crew, we are weakening our own First Amendment protections."

-Brenda Payton
Oakland TRIBUNE
6/12/90.

2 Live Crew's album cover had four women with their bare buns exposed for the buyer to see. Gee, I wonder why they didn't bust the Miss Universe Pageant. -C. G.

Rap is nothing new. In the forties this form of adolescent linguistic oneupmanship was called *doing the nines* or *the dozens* . You can read about this in THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X which was ghost-written by Alex Haley. Shakespeare was fond of this form and used it often in his comedies. The same use of rhythm and language is found throughout Classical Greek drama. The boom box that emphasizes contemporary American rap is analogous to a jungle drum and when the message is political, which it often is, one cannot help but recall the early talking blues of bob dylan.

PINK UNDERWEAR WHAT?

Wagner used themes like aging, child abuse, incest and the loss of one's eyes. And Wagner himself had some striking psychiatric problems. He had real anxieties about his body and several fetishes. He would fondle satin cloth while writing, and he had special costumes made, including a pair of pink underwear that excited him.

--UCSF Psych Prof Peter Ostwald, quoted by Martin Snapp in the Oakland TRIBUNE, 6/7/90.

Question is, what would the judge have said about Wagner's RING TRILOGY?

5 O'CLOCK SHADOW 3 is $1 pp from Not Available Comics, 3867 Bristow, Detroit, MI 48212. Matt Madden did the cover and Matt Feazall is inside!

MEDIA ABSURDITY

A woman on a panel on DONAHUE says one out of every three women in LA will be raped or assaulted. Donahue says, and we hope you'll join us and the audience applauds as the screen goes to a kool aid commercial. August 17, 1981

Rabbit feels that his world is changing. I have him say that if there is no Cold War he doesn't see the point of being an American anymore.
John Updike on his fourth Rabbit Angstrom novel, RABBIT AT REST. 6/90

While my classmates were deciding which colleges to apply to, I was deciding which gun to wear with what sequinned dress!
Priscilla Presley, 1985

Figment is using fantasy, horror, and sci-fi stuff. Write to Barb or J. C. Hendee for their information. POB 3566, Moscow, ID 83843-0477.

Those interested in John Wade III's C Sheet should send him 25 ¢ and a stamped envelope for a sample issue. Box 6308, Fort Wayne, Ind. 46896.

Did you know John Updike wanted to be a cartoonist? His mother kept a scrapbook of his childhood drawings and he met his first wife when he hung out with the gang at the Harvard LAMPOON. "I think people that draw and paint are happier than those who write," said Updike in a 1985 interview.

JUDY BLUME ON CENSORSHIP

We often think of censorship in terms of books being taken off the library shelves or out of our favorite bookstore, but the most insidious kind of censorship occurs *before* a book appears in print. July Blume told her audience at the 90th Annual American Booksellers' Convention in Las Vegas about an incident where an editor asked her to *reconsider* a paragraph in one of her scheduled books that dealt with masturbation by a teenaged character. She took it out and regretted her decision later.

"If I was this sensitive as an established author," she said, "imagine how the fear of offending can influence a beginning writer. Censorship is not just about books being removed from libraries and book stores. It is about writers who fail to write truly." The ABA has launched the Foundation for Free Expression, an organization designed to advise booksellers on how to handle outside pressure to remove material on sale in their stores.

Ken Greene has CURLEY TAILS FROM SHAKESPEARE for 50¢/stamp.
753 Tamarack Ave. San Carlos, CA 94070.

GREY LEGACY 0 is available from Wayne Wise and Fred Wheaton, RD 1, Box 115, Graysville, PA 15337. DZ, Nice.

OMOWALE 2 is $1.75 pp from By Any Means Necessary. POB 111271, Omaha, NE 68111-5271. Omowale is a Yoruka word meaning *the child has come home* . This issue has an interesting retrospective on Black comic book characters by Keith Henry Brown entitled *Growing up Black Reading Comics.*

ACE TALKS BACK

While I agree with your comments in COMICS/FX that editors/publishers have no obligation to respond to unsolicited work, I think it's a different story when it comes to specifically solicited work. Yet, I've found with so many of these publishers you get the same result anyway. And I for one am getting sick of being blown off by these guys just cuz they know we're powerless nobodies who they can jack off to their heart's content cuz they could care less.

In any other profession if you're hired to do a specific piece of work, you produce the piece of work, and then not only are you NOT paid, but you're also completely blown off without even an explanation, I believe that would be grounds for lawsuits. And yet in the comics field that's standard operating procedure. I was wondering if any of your readers have suffered similar discourtesies and how they have dealt with the situation. [5/24/90]

Ace Backwards

Any comments, readers? C. G.